

Interview with
Mr. Julian Stein
Los Altos, California
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I began managing farm labor camps in 1943; during World War 2, I managed a Federal camp in Tulare County, and during World War 2 we housed Mexican-Nationals. Now, you may wonder why we were using nationals since that camp had been built for 'dust bowl' migrants; well, I'll tell you, in that camp which was built to house 300 families, in 1943 we were down to 36 domestic families all the other had gone into war industries; the 36 who were left were the ones who had the least gumption. So, I think there can be no argument about it, we had to have nationals during World War 2; after the war was over the number of nationals in our area dropped to nothing, but then when the Korean War broke out in the middle of 1950, the need arose again.

Now, some people seem to have the idea that this is a cheap labor program, don't kind yourselves, it is not. It costs the growers who house their nationals in my camp 15 per cent of their payroll for the maintenance of the camp; it costs 2 1/2 per cent more of their payroll for workman's compensation insurance; they also have to pay a certain amount for their association membership. They have to pay for the round trip transportation of the nationals, and they have to pay a flat rate of \$16 per head to the United States Government for administration of the program. Now, let me tell you some other ways in which this program can and does cost, and cost plenty. In Tulare, last year we were all set up to use 300 nationals in the harvest season; lo and behold, a bunch of local people showed up to work that we hadn't expected; well, according to the law we had no choice, we had to hire the locals and we had to cancel the contracts of the nationals; when the nationals are pulled out that way, before their contracts were due to expire, the growers are stuck for 75% per cent of the wages they would have earned.

In general, I would say that the growers that are in our association prefer to use domestics. Our members grow disiguous fruits, largely peaches and plums, and so forth; as I say, they prefer locals and they prefer to bring in nationals only as insurance in cases domestics don't show up; these are highly perishable crops, you know. One of our growers, for example, who has several peach orchards worked 13 crews this year, 12 of them were made up entirely of domestics, one was made up entirely of nationals; the nationals were shuttled around as trouble-shooters wherever there was an orchard that needed picking fast and was getting ahead of the domestics, in peaches, you know, you pick them within 48 hours or you can forget about your crop.

A lot of people seem to think that we are overrun by Mexican-Nationals and that they dominate California's agriculture, this is a ~~xxx~~ mistake. In Tulare County this year, at the peak, which is in June only 4 per cent of our hired farm labor ~~existed~~ consisted of Mexican-Nationals; by hired farm labor, you understand, I am not including the self-employed farmers and unpaid family workers; the nationals would make up an even smaller percentage of the total farm labor force; furthermore, I would say beyond any shadow of a doubt that the trend is all in the direction of our using fewer nationals in the future.